

For more than a month, I have devoted space in this column to the crisis in the Gulf of Mexico. The oil leak continues to dominate our lives along the Gulf Coast and is increasingly influencing political policy here in Washington, both good and bad.

As of this writing, BP is attempting to shut off the oil leak by using a procedure known as "top kill" to force mud and concrete down the well's blowout preventer in order to close it. The process has been underway for several days and it is, so far, unclear if it will be successful.

Like everyone else, I find it difficult to understand why it has taken over a month to seal the damaged oil well. While watching BP's robotic ROV's working on the well 5,000 feet below the surface of the Gulf, one is reminded of the NASA rovers on the surface of Mars. For BP, the remoteness of the oil well is nearly as difficult to reach since no human can survive at that depth.

Still, it's frustrating beyond words and frankly unacceptable that the public should be made to feel helpless and watch this crisis for more than a month with so many resources at the disposal of the federal government.

As the oil laps up on the shores of Louisiana, Governor Bobby Jindal has implored the Obama administration, and specifically the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to allow his state to construct new barrier islands in an attempt to block some of the oil from sensitive wildlife areas.

Yet, the political pushback from the administration has been, frankly, irresponsible. Obama administration officials' comments about the governor's previous lack of support for federal programs demonstrate a total lack of seriousness from some in Washington in addressing this crisis.

Need we remind them that this spill – unlike Hurricane Katrina - occurred in federal waters and the U.S. Government has jurisdiction. Furthermore, the president has finally declared that he is taking charge of the spill. While no one is accusing the president of causing the explosion, he has taken ownership and responsibility.

This is not a political debate over national health care. It is the basic duty of our government to provide for the general welfare and safety of our citizens. The spill in the Gulf has already been declared the largest in U.S. history by President Obama's own cabinet and it is Washington's role to lead when disasters strike our population.

President Obama also announced that he is extending a moratorium on new offshore oil drilling in the Gulf and elsewhere. While there is no doubt that we should take every step to ensure that all coastal oil drilling is safe, the administration's position appears to be more political than practical.

There are those in Washington who seem all too willing to exploit the accident in the Gulf for political reasons. Now is not the time for hasty political decisions, but rather a time for devoting full attention to the containment of this unprecedented oil spill. Also, we must take steps to prevent such an event from happening again.

To that end, I am an original cosponsor of the Gulf Oil Spill Response and Assistance Act, H.R. 5356, which would raise the cap on liability for economic damages resulting from oil spills, and also requires the U.S. Coast Guard to develop technology to promptly and adequately respond to major deep sea oil spills such as the one we now face.

This legislation cannot obviously solve our current oil spill, but it is intended to help reduce the catastrophic impact of future spills, while ensuring all responsible parties are held accountable for costs to the area economy as well as clean-up.

In the meantime, the people of the Gulf Coast deserve and demand a fully committed federal government, focused on stopping the ongoing spill and containing its impact.

### **House Repeals "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Rule for Military:**

Last week, the U.S. House voted to repeal a 17-year-old Clinton administration compromise policy designed to maintain the military's ban on gays within their ranks.

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" has been controversial, but it has also allowed the military to maintain the discipline and morale that it needs to perform its mission.

In a shameful act, the administration has gone over the heads of our military leadership, who were reviewing the impact of the current policy, forcing them to accept a radical change without even knowing the final impact on military readiness.

I voted against the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and believe this misguided move will ultimately undermine the morale of our military.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721 or visit my website. <http://bonner.house.gov/> .

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